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La Salle Faculty Panel: Questions, Problems and Approaches to Working with La Salle Students

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Presenter Information

Donna Fiedler, Janet Fierson, Barbara Hoerst, Kim Lewinski, Kathleen McNichol, and William Price

La Salle Faculty Speak about the Differentiated Classroom

La Salle Summer Workshop 2012

The La Salle Summer Workshop Program (June, 2012) included a Faculty Panel with representatives from several of La Salle's professional programs and the mathematics and science departments. Here are some of their comments.

Panel Members:

- Donna Fiedler, Social Work
- Janet Fierson, Mathematics & Computer Science
- Barbara Hoerst, Director, Undergraduate Nursing
- Kim Lewinski, Education
- Kathleen McNichol, Finance
- William Price, Chair, Chemistry

Donna Fiedler: The greatest differentiation in Social Work is in the evening program. To facilitate reading skills, we do lots of small group work and lots of primary reading, junior and senior year. Students write responses to questions on Blackboard. In turn they receive individual commentaries on their work. It does help that our practice classes are small—12-18.

Experiential learning is dominant in the Social Work program. Students are in the field the second semester junior year, and their whole year senior year.

William Price: Preparation prior to college. Motivations, and expectations about homework, are the major differentiation factors that differentiate students in Chemistry classes. The Nursing students are "ready to roll." They have a good orientation. They are highly motivated and have realistic expectations of the amount of time it takes to study for our courses.

On the other hand, many of our students want to go to medical school. However, they are not aware of the time it takes to do well in Organic Chemistry, for example. This course includes very abstract material and requires many skills including the ability to visualize the material

Post-Baccalaureate students who are changing careers are typically very good students. They are highly motivated and understand the requirements of these courses. However, they are mixed in with the 18 and 19 year olds who believe that they can get by through memorization, just as they did in high school.

In the summer, I've segregated them. Each group asks a completely different set of questions.

Of course some traditional undergraduate students are outstanding.

Kathleen McNichol: When I first started here, students worked hard. They may not have been the best and the brightest, but they were motivated. The question today is “How do we get students engaged?” I am finding that our assignments must be more structured than they were. Expectations must be made clear. It’s not a matter of dumbing down assignments.

Experiential learning is also very important: Internships, for example.

Janet Fierson:

- It’s my first year here. Coming from West Point, I have more positive than negative impressions. One of the big problems: the amount of time they should be spending outside of the classroom, especially if it’s not related to the major. Students say, “I just want you to know that this is the first time I actually studied for a quiz.”
- Communication a problem: Students don’t respond to emails.
- Fear of working on their own. They want many examples from the instructor.
- Only a small percentage of students who answer. Afraid to answer—afraid of getting it wrong.
- They think initially that it will be like high school
- Students also want to see real world applications, but then say “I can’t do word problems.” Afraid of failure.
- A certain portion of the class needs skills that they should have mastered prior to taking the course. Sometimes I give out a worksheet so that students who are facile can keep going.
- Group work: asking one of the students in the group to respond.
- Things that I have thought of: Grouping students by major or ability.

Kim Lewinski: Many of our students have had bad experiences reading and writing. One technique: read anything you want at the beginning of the semester. Writing workshops. Research papers. Thinking about different genres. Presenting those papers at the end, very important. Showcase their work.

- Don’t tell me you don’t like to read or write: Let’s find a way to enjoy it.
- They pick a topic they are passionate about it. A unique presentation—not necessarily in the academic genre.
- They must understand the importance of reading and writing in their own lives
- What really is important is a **social apprenticeship** as well as a cognitive apprenticeship. Social takes place outside of class.
- The student who thinks “I’m a good writer.” We must show them that they need to learn college writing.

- The Assignment: What is the role of writing in X?" Disciplinary perspective—or outside—"What is the role of writing in politics?" This is the social angle. They can make a web site.
- Self-Reflection: Students write a self-evaluation:—week 5—week 10—week 15: It can be something I said, what they have learned in the class that is most important: one page. They give themselves a grade at that point. How am I going to take this course with me" Now I see why we read that particular book. —We get so caught up in the assignment we don't think why we are doing them. What am I taking away from this course? Why did we read this particular book?

Barbara Hoerst, Director, Undergraduate Nursing

Nursing students are differentiated by age, gender, academic preparedness, race and ethnicity.

What hasn't worked is separating weaker students from stronger ones in classroom or in clinical. We have tried this and the weaker groups have not had a good experience (either students or faculty); without special learning supports, this type of separation doesn't work

What has worked:

- Narrated powerpoints (students are encouraged to listen at their own pace to narrated powerpoints of essential material for content in clinical courses; this has been evaluated by students to be extremely helpful
- PrepU is an adaptive review program offered with certain textbooks published by LWW. It allows students to gain mastery of content and identify areas of weakness through an adaptive system that increases difficulty level of review questions as student correctly answers questions that are at an easier level; we have used this for 2 semesters as a pilot program and initial results are good. Students have evaluated program very positively and actually use it (faculty can go into system and monitor use by students); faculty have seen an increase in quiz and test averages (whether this is significant or will be upheld as time goes on is too early to tell). Faculty can identify content areas where many students are missing questions – this provides then direction for the next class meeting to go over content that needs further explanation.
- We have increased lab support with faculty who are available for review of content as well as clinical skills.